

ARIZONA VETERANS' SERVICE ADVISORY COMMISSION
4141 N. Third Street –Phoenix, AZ 85012
Thursday – February 8, 2007

M I N U T E S

Call to Order - The meeting was called to order at 10:04 a.m. by Chairman Ellis.

Present

Advisory Commissioners

Webb Ellis, Chairperson
Tom Dingwall, Vice Chair
Joe Bibich
Gary Fredricks
Linda Fulkerson
Phillip Quochytewa
Kenneth Yamanouchi

Arizona Department of Veterans' Services

Patrick F. Chorpenning, Director
Lee Borgen, ADVS Vets' Benefit Counselor
Gabe Forsberg, Strategic Planner

Absent

Tom Heaney

Opening - The minutes of the January 20, 2007 meeting were approved.

Correspondence Sent and Received – The Commission sent invitations to the January 20 meeting (approximately 75) and the following:

- A letter of support for the Arizona Veterans Museum to Julie Ebersole for attachment to a grant application filed by the City of Phoenix before the February meeting.
- A letter to the Director outlining that the secretarial duties for the January 20 meeting had been assumed by Lee Borgen, Veterans Benefits Counselor.

Thank you letters were also sent out to numerous addressees who supported the January 20 meeting in Green Valley.

Arizona Veterans Museum at Steele Indian School Park Project - Julie Ebersole, Park Director of the Steele Indian School Park with the City of Phoenix Parks and Recreation Department, provided a briefing on the progress of the museum. Joan Sisco agreed to prepare a support letter that would be turned in with a grant application for \$170,000 to help move the project forward. Building renovations are expected to cost more than \$3 million. The roof has been repaired with grant money received last year and asbestos abatement will be the next step in renovation.

There are three historic buildings in the park, and the building in the middle is the one that will serve as the Bob Stump Arizona Veterans Museum. The buildings are being renovated as funding becomes available. Renovation of one of the other buildings, Memorial Hall, will be completed at the end of 2007 thanks to special support from Arizona's Indian Tribes.

The museum building is 5800 square feet and its primary purpose is to display artifacts and to serve as the home of the Arizona Veterans Hall of Fame. The building is on an historical preservation list, making renovations costly and unpredictable.

Ms. Ebersole currently shares an office with Debbie Warren and they look forward to taking up residence in the renovated building where the museum will be housed.

Director's Report - Pat Chorpenning, ADVS Director, reported the following:

- He has been working on draft rules to support the agency's position regarding organizations raising funds in the name of veterans in Arizona. He hopes to have draft rules to the Advisory Commission by the next meeting.
- There have been some personnel changes at the Sierra Vista office.
- The Governor recently established a longer-term group to deal with issues of importance to the veteran community, as recommended by the Veterans Task Force. A copy of Executive Order 2007-08 Arizona Veterans Research Council was distributed.
- He has made various presentations supporting the Governor's Budget as it relates to the Arizona Department of Veterans' Services (ADVS).
 - Both houses support the requested 19 VBCs.
 - There are some differences between the House and the Senate version of the agency's budget that must be worked out.
- DES is working with ADVS to house some of the new VBCs. He is continuing to establish offices throughout the state and will report as he is aware of new office locations.
 - Commissioner Bibich asked if the Commissioners could assist in finding office space in the out counties. Director Chorpensing gratefully accepted his offer to find space in Bullhead City.
- Legislative support from the veteran community. In the past, veterans have been asked to attend hearings and have learned of legislative issues via email from the Arizona Department of Veterans' Services. The Director is focusing on becoming financially sound this session and has not requested any bills be introduced by the Department.
 - This does not mean that he is not closely monitoring many bills that have an impact to the military and veteran community.
 - He will ask that a bill summary be supplied to the Commission so that they can see which bills he is monitoring.
 - The fact that he is monitoring a bill does not indicate support or opposition to the bill; it merely means that the Department is interested in its status.
- Executive Order 2007-08 establishes the Arizona Veterans Research Council (AVRC) and was signed by the Governor on January 30, 2007. Two Advisory Commissioners are required to participate and Chairman Ellis will serve as one. The other member from the Commission would be a volunteer whose term extends beyond 7/1/07.
 - The AVRC is functioning as a subcommittee of the Commanders Council. Commissioner Dingwall recognized that the Commanders Council has proven to be the first organization comprised of the State Commanders and Adjutants of the most active veterans service organizations. The Commanders Council has worked cooperatively discussing issues of importance to all veterans, making the group an historic first in Arizona.
 - This is a research council and not a task force; each of its members will be responsible for conducting significant research into issues of importance to the veteran community.
 - An interim report is due in mid-August; and the final report is due to the Governor, the Speaker of the House, and the President of the Senate by January 2008.
 - Additional members of the AVRC may be appointed at the Governor's discretion.
 - Ken Yamanouchi volunteered to serve as the second AVRC member. His health care background would be invaluable to the Veterans Research Council. Commissioner Yamanouchi will submit his application and required documentation to Director Chorpensing as soon as possible so he could get it to Dora Vasquez at the Governor's Office.
 - The rest of the Commission will be asked to participate in the research of the Council. Chairman Ellis will prepare a letter that offers assistance by all of the Commissioners to work on subcommittees, attaching biographical sketches of each Commissioner. The Advisory Commissioners will participate in the research efforts according to their areas of interest.

Native American Day - The 21 Arizona tribes had breakfast with the Governor on January 17 and then met with lawmakers. The purpose was to discuss issues of importance to their tribes. Phillip Quochytewa felt it went very well and it was an excellent educational process.

Region 2 Meeting to be Held in the Spring - Chairman Ellis and Commissioner Quochytewa will be responsible for the Region 2 meeting. The original date that was agreed to by the Commissioners was April 14. There were two Commissioners who will not be able to attend the meeting on that date. Chairman Ellis will be visiting Payson to see possible meeting locations.

Region 3 Meeting Held January 20, 2006 in Green Valley – Tom Dingwall said that this region meeting had been the most successful in terms of number of attendees and the individuals who attended. Senate President Tim Bee and Rep. Marian McClure were both at the meeting, along with a County Supervisor, the veteran representative from Congresswoman Gabrielle Giffords office, and local dignitaries. The hospitality was excellent and the meeting environment was very comfortable.

Pepe Mendoza, Public Affairs - Southern Arizona Veterans Affairs Medial Center, did an excellent job representing the VA. It was obvious to the Commissioners that the attendees of the meeting in Green Valley held the VAMC in Tucson in very high esteem.

War Orphan Education Bill - Joe Bibich has been an ardent supporter of this concept and was disappointed that the language that emerged in HB 2510 was not what he and Mike Fugate had worked out. He felt that some of the questions about the bill posed by its opponents would have been answered if the original language had been left in. Director Chorpenning said that it is always possible to make amendments to the bills, but felt that it is premature at this time to propose changes. He suggested that Commissioner Bibich wait to see the specific issues that are raised by opponents in the bill's present form.

The bill was drafted in response to a question that Commissioner Bibich posed to the Governor when she was visiting Mojave County last October. Governor Napolitano supported the bill in concept at that time and Commissioner Bibich rallied legislative support to draft the bill. One of the most difficult issues facing the bill is an accurate determination of its financial impact in view of such unknown factors as the length of the war, residency requirements, etc.

Announcements Requiring No Action

Southwest Defense Alliance will be meeting at the end of this month. The purpose of the organization is to defend the military presence in California, New Mexico and Arizona. Its primary function is to prepare for Base Realignment and Closure (BRAC) efforts. Congresswoman Giffords will host a veterans' forum the evening before the meeting starts, and has asked the Director to help her coordinate the meeting. Director Chorpenning will publicize the forum.

Federal Lawmakers – Director Chorpenning announced the following:

- Congressman Harry Mitchell has been appointed to serve on the House Veterans Affairs Committee and is assigned to a subcommittee overseeing the US Department of Veterans Affairs. Director Chorpenning asked him to investigate VA educational benefits. Congressman Mitchell taught civics in Tempe for 25 years and is very interested in helping vets.
- Congressman Rick Renzi asked Director Chorpenning to call a meeting next week in Washington, D.C. with Congressman Mitchell regarding issues of importance to the veterans in Arizona.
- Congresswoman Giffords has the Tucson VA Medical Center in her district and has been working closely with the Director on issues of importance to veteran community.

VA Education Letter – The Advisory Commission's January 10, 2007 letter regarding VA Education has received notice from Congressmen Renzi and Mitchell who contacted Director Chorpenning. The US Department of Veterans Affairs has recently initiated a procurement process to secure counseling services for veterans so that they are provided with information about their educational benefits.

Administrative Issues for the Commission

Assess Personal Data on Commission business Cards - Linda Fulkerson was recently visited by an individual at her home demanding emergency funding assistance. She had a neighbor who kept the incident from escalating, but it was unnerving. The Commission will no longer include personal addresses and phone numbers on business cards.

Policy for Commission Travel Reimbursement - If a Commissioner increases the cost of travel reimbursement because he or she brings a spouse, Chairman Ellis feels that the Commissioner should bear the costs that exceed costs had the Commissioner been traveling alone. Director Chorpenning suggested that the decisions on travel reimbursement need to be reasonable and that the Commissioners should let their conscience be their guide. State policies specify allowable expenses and will be the ultimate authority.

Open Discussion / Call to the Public -

Stand Down in Yuma - Linda Fulkerson said that she had been told that there will not be a Stand Down this year, because of various difficulties encountered.

American Indian Veterans – Chairman Ellis recognized Mr. Elbert Wheeler with the Navajo Nation, who indicated he had several points to make. He first questioned the degree of support being given by the Department/Commission to bills impacting Native American veterans. Mr. Wheeler mentioned three bills specifically: SB 1305 – Fishing Licenses for Disabled Veterans; HB 2329 Native American Veterans Outreach; and SB 1192 - Code Talkers Monument. Discussion of SB 1192 revealed that it only recognized one tribe and did not recognize other American Indian tribal members who served as Code Talkers.

Region 2 Meeting – Mr. Wheeler also suggested that the Commission consider holding the Region 2 meeting in the extreme northeast corner of the state (on the reservation). Chairman Ellis indicated that the location for the spring meeting had already been established, but the Commission would certainly consider holding the next meeting in Region 2 at any location where it would maximize the number of veterans who would attend. El Wheeler indicated that he could guarantee 50 – 200 veterans would attend a meeting on the reservation, and the Commission will consider his request as future meeting locations are decided.

Arizona Veterans Research Council - Mr. Wheeler requested that American Indian veterans be represented on the Council. Chairman Ellis pointed out that the Executive Order appointing the members had already been signed by the Governor; but during the Arizona Veterans Council meeting earlier in the week, it was strongly noted that American Indian interests must be included in any research. By including all Commissioners in the research effort, Commissioner Quochytewa will have an oversight capability for issues dealing with the American Indians. One such subcommittee will deal with rural veterans and overcoming obstacles to their service.

American Indian Veterans Advisory Committee – Mr. Wheeler asked what the Advisory Commission is doing about issues that had been raised in that group. Neither Director Chorpenning nor Chairman Ellis was aware of what those issues are. They were being addressed internally at the request of the tribal representative to the American Indian Veterans Advisory Committee.

- Commissioner Quochytewa outlined the history of the Council:
 - It came about in response to testimony in the Veterans Task Force in the fall of 2005 when various tribes requested assistance with American Indian veteran issues. Director Chorpenning promised to help establish a special task force that would serve as a forum for American Indian veteran issues.
 - After hosting and facilitating several meetings, the Department turned over the meeting to its appointed leadership. The Department offered to continue to host the meetings

at the Arizona State Veteran Home in Phoenix, if its leadership felt that would be helpful.

- There was a large package of information distributed at the last meeting, but only three attended the meeting. The actions outlined were to be taken by the Council itself and not by the Advisory Commission or the Arizona Department of Veterans' Services.
- The poor attendance may have been due to high fuel costs to travel to Phoenix, and Commissioner Quochoytewa has not given up on finding other meeting locations.
 - In order to meet at certain tribal buildings, Commissioner Quochoytewa has had to formally request the use of the building of the tribal councils.
 - He is still encouraging the tribes to come together on issues of importance to all American Indian veterans and has not stopped working toward that end.

Adjournment – The meeting adjourned at 12:45 p.m. by acclamation. The next regular meeting will be held at 10 a.m. on March 8, 2007 at the Arizona State Veteran Home – 4141 N. Third Street, Phoenix, AZ 85012.